Figs Easy to Grow in Home landscapes

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

Home gardeners in Galveston County frequently have fruit trees in their landscapes and the fig is certainly one of the most popular. Master Gardener Terry Cuclis will provide a hands-on demonstration on pruning figs in the Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration in Carbide Park in La Marque at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, January 28.

Home gardeners in Galveston County frequently have fruit trees in their landscapes, and the fig is certainly one of the most popular. If you're a fan of figs, you'll be glad to know that fig trees are one of the easiest fruit trees to grow around your home. With little care, they will produce crops of juicy, sweet figs every year. The fruit is tasty and can be eaten fresh, made into preserves and jams, or used in baking. Figs make nice additions to landscape plantings.

The fig, *Ficus carica*, was first introduced to the Americas in 1575 by Spanish explorers in Florida. Figs originated in the Old World Tropics in the Mediterranean region where it has been cultivated since as early as 5,000 BC.

Local gardeners grow several cultivars of figs. One of the more popular and reliable fig cultivars is known as 'Celeste'; it also happens to be my favorite cultivar. 'Celeste' figs are small- to medium-size fruits with purplish-bronze to light brown skin color. 'Celeste' begins ripening in early July and is good fresh or processed. I'm partial to the sweet flavor of freshly harvested 'Celeste' figs.

'LSU Purple' has been out for a few years and

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has good resistance to foliage diseases. 'LSU Purple' bears medium-size, dark-purple fruit. 'LSU Purple' has a tendency to produce three distinct crops, a light crop in early spring, a heavy main crop in early July and a later crop sometimes lasting into December.

Four fig cultivars will be offered at the upcoming Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale to be held on Saturday, February 20, in the Rodeo Arena at the Galveston County Fairgrounds near Hwy. 6 in Hitchcock. Visit http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/educ_programs/index.htm for a listing of other types of fruit trees and vegetable transplants to be offered.

Now through mid-March is a good time to purchase fig trees and plant them. When choosing a location for a fig tree, plan for growth. Although not huge, fig trees will grow 15 feet or more in height and width.

Also, plant them in a sunny location away from large trees with overhanging branches. Figs will not produce well unless they receive at least six hours of direct sun daily, and more is better.

Fig trees ordinarily do not produce a good crop of fruit until the third or fourth year after planting. One to four-year-old trees often produce fruit (you'll see little green figs where the leaves join the stem), but it usually fails to ripen and drops off. 'LSU Purple' is an exception, often producing small crops one to two years after planting. Figs bear their main crop on new growth produced during the spring and summer.

You may train your fig into a large bush-like shape with several trunks or into a more typical tree shape with a single trunk. You won't need to do much pruning the first few years after planting – other than beginning to shape it the way you want it to grow.

Pruning established figs is best done now through late February. Yearly pruning helps to maintain vigor, create the desired shape of the tree and control its size (which makes harvesting easier).

It is best to cut a fig tree back a moderate amount every year or two than to allow it to grow so large that severe pruning is required. Most of the branches cut back should be no larger than 1 inch to 2 inches in diameter.

If substantial pruning back is done to reduce the size of or rejuvenate an older tree, fruit production the following summer will typically be reduced. The tree should, however, produce well thereafter.

Master Gardner Terry Cuclis has years of experience growing different cultivars of figs. Terry will provide a hands-on demonstration on pruning figs in the Master Gardener Horticulture Demonstration Garden in Carbide Park in La Marque at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, January 28. Terry will also discuss growing figs. His program is free of charge but pre-registration is requested (phone: 281-534-3413, ext. 1-2; e-mail GALV3@wt.net).

Anyone Can Grow Roses Seminar

It would be hard to find a flower more universally loved than the rose. Over humanity's long history with this plant, the rose has found its way into our gardens, cuisine, medicine, art and cultures. It is easier than ever to find undemanding, reliable roses that will enhance your landscape.

Galveston County Master Gardener and American Rose Society Consulting Rosarian John Jons will provide a seminar covering all the basics for growing hybrid tea roses, including variety selection, bed preparation, planting and culture, as well as insect and disease control.

His seminar will be conducted from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 28, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located at 4102-B Main Street (Carbide Park) in La Marque. No fee but pre-registration is requested (phone: 281-534-3413, ext. 1-2; e-mail GALV3@wt.net).